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ABSTRACT

Several research studies that have compared the effects of television viewing on economically disadvantaged black children with its effects on white children indicate that the black children tend to allocate more time to television, are less selective in choosing content, and are more likely to accept fictional stories as reality. In addition, the black children use television to learn information, display a high level of involvement in television content, and are likely to identify with the portrayal of black characters (black people appear on about half of the fictional programs). Isolating these critical factors concerning television viewing and the minority child clarifies new research issues for the future such as exploring the consequences of the child's social role attitude and the expectations that the child develops about specific role behaviors. A research model based on social learning theory offers a theoretical approach for examining such key variables as child attributes, message content factors, and social influences. (MAI)

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Learning About Minorities From Television: The Research Agenda

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This paper was prepared for the conference, "Television and the Socialization of the Minority Child," convened by The Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California at Los Angeles.

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Learning About Minorities From Television:
The Research Agenda

This conference appears to pose three intersecting research questions:

First, what content about minorities appears on television that may shape beliefs and expectations about minorities?

Second, what impacts of television that have been identified for children in general may have special significance for minority children in particular?

Third, how do the portrayals of minorities on television impact on the self-concept, on the race-related expectations of minority children?

This paper will move among these questions, perhaps not treating any of them comprehensively, but searching for critical issues in each. To do so, we shall identify what commercial television is now programming about minorities, we shall examine what we believe to be the special vulnerability of the minority child to television programming, and we shall review the available research evidence as to television's impact on minority youngsters. In large part, however, we shall pose a research agenda that consolidates the several research questions into a scheme that will permit more definitive answers than are currently available.

Let us begin by scanning the current television season. For three years, our project (Project CASTLE) at Michigan State University has videotaped a single episode of each fictional, prime-time and Saturday morning series available early in the fall season. This sample week of episodes has then been systematically content analyzed on a number of dimensions, including racial, sexual and family portrayals, as well as some innovative efforts at analyzing pro- and anti-social behaviors. It remains true that when we speak of minorities on television, the only minority available for any sort of intensive analysis are Blacks. Other

minorities, e.g., Spanish Americans are still invisible. No minority other than Blacks have been able to sufficiently intrude television programming, and therefore cannot be expected to have much impact from their presentations. Their absence could contribute to a weakened self-concept among young people of the missing minorities.

From the current television season, our preliminary findings stem from some basic quantitative considerations, inasmuch as the qualitative analysis of this season's Blacks is still in progress. Our sample week encompassed 81 different fictional television series, of which 43 had one or more Black characters. Thus, half of the television shows had a Black, and this proportion has been relatively constant since 1970. In all, 101 different Blacks were identified on these shows. For other minorities, there were 12 American Indians and 13 Spanish-Americans. The population of speaking characters with codable ethnic origins numbered 1,100. So, the population of television Blacks comprised a little more than 9% of the population. This has been the proportion for the last decade, as reported in half a dozen different studies. The surge to include Blacks on commercial television in the late sixties resulted in an increase to this level by 1968 or 1969, and has remained there since that time. You can virtually count on the fact that one in 10 or 11 TV characters will be Black.

Regardless of whether you consider this proportion adequate or not, its stability over time is remarkable. Furthermore, the population of Blacks exhibits a curious density pattern. Stated less politely, there is a distinct black ghetto on television. Nearly one-half (n=44) of this season's blacks exist on just six shows ("Muhammed Ali, Fat Albert, The Jeffersons, Good Times, What's Happening?, and Sanford Arms). Thus, half the TV Blacks were segregated among themselves, and the other half were widely diffused, spreading 57 characters across 75 television

programs. Two thirds of all the black characters were in situation comedies or in Saturday cartoons.

In this year's study, we made one major analytic change. We drew a sample of 101 white characters from the same shows which had yielded our Black population. Prior studies that have made any comparisons, typically compared the available blacks with all whites on TV. It seemed important for us to determine if the blacks were at least similar to those whites appearing on the same show with them, for they provided the most accessible comparative references for young viewers, in terms of potential role models. Only some very basic comparisons have been made at this date. First the white sample was heavily male, 71% in total; the black sample less so, with just under 60% males. The white characters thus contain the same sex bias that has been demonstrated in repeated content analyses since 1970; the black characters, more typically found in family settings, give more equivalent emphasis to women. Second, the sample of black characters was strikingly younger than the white sample; two-thirds of the former were in their 20's or younger, compared to less than half the white sample in these age groups. Television ignores the elderly blacks even more so than whites on television; but television also ignores young and somewhat mature black adults in its standard programming. So, this attempt to compare TV black characterizations with same-show whites is promising, and it may provide a new dimension for evaluating this component of television content.

Let us now move from an examination of television content to issues regarding the child viewer of television, with particular emphasis on the minority child, and that child's special susceptibility to being socialized by television programs.

It is our thesis here that the question of the minority child's vulnerability to television content can best focus on that very large subset of minority children who are simultaneously economically disadvantaged. In 1970, the census identified

23 million Black Americans; 9.5 million were under 18, and four million of these were below defined poverty levels. These four million black children constituted 40% of all U.S. children below the poverty line (U.S. Census, 1970). Despite some expected gains during this decade, it is still possible to claim that this special intersection of black children and poor children provides a legitimate and appropriate target group for studies of television's effects. If one were slightly more expansive in considering economic needs, it would be possible to stipulate that half of all black children under 18 are economically disadvantaged. This is not done to tightly link the attributes of race and economics. Rather, it is done to facilitate our understanding of the potential impacts of television on minority children, especially when those minority children also face economic deprivation.

The environment of the poor black child carries in it a set of psychological and social orientations which should be identified here. If one wishes to analyze television, it must be done within the child's existing context of potential and actual needs. As these children watch television, one must account for such major life perceptions as those which follow:

....Emphasis on short-term goals. There is little opportunity to plan ahead. Even stronger than average preferences for immediate gratifications are related to the realities of being poor.

....Emphasis on the concrete. Events and people are less likely to be judged in abstract terms. Emphasis is on here-and-now in terms of observable attributes and behaviors. Practical actions hold forth; intellectuality may be rejected.

....Lack of efficacy. Whether labeled alienation, powerlessness, anomie, isolation or fatalism, it more likely characterizes the minority group member, especially the impoverished ones. There is lesser belief that one can influence one's own destiny.

....Low self-esteem. The adult poor see themselves as incapable and inefficient. This self-awareness is transmitted to the children. For the black child, it is exacerbated if there are inadequate black role models available.

....Non-achievement. To the extent that hopes and aspirations are thwarted, or do not develop because the environment does not nurture them, a typical response is to stop attempting to achieve.

....Aspiration-achievement discrepancy. Given a culture which glories in and constantly transmits messages about societal achievements, and given some sense of a higher probability of failure, a paradox results. One aspires to and values the same things as the major society, e.g., more luxuries, better lives, more education, but the discrepancy perceived between self-achievement and these aspirations is large and frustrating.

....Illusion. Illusion and fantasy become more a way of life among the poor. Men talk of imagined conquests of women; women talk of material things they do not have. Illusion provides a self-protective coping mechanism.

....Restricted options and experiences. Lack of resources clearly limits alternative responses to life situations. Further experiences are a function of the social class in which one survives; experiences in the home and at work are of a much different nature; empathy with and understanding of the values and behaviors of other races or other economic groups is limited.

Like all listings, these are not universal characteristics, nor are they mutually exclusive (cf., Chilman, 1966; Epstein, 1961; Gottlieb, 1964; Irelan and Besmer, 1965; Keller, 1963; Lewis, 1966; Minuchin et al, 1967). There are many within-group differences. However, as appropriate as these attributes are for characterizing both the Black poor and the non-Black poor, they are intensified for the former.

It is in this context, then, that we may begin to examine what and how television becomes an integral part of the black child's daily life, continuing with a special emphasis on the poor black child. Before doing that, let us capture the essence of the development of minority role portrayals in the media.

Minority Role Portrayals

The mass media, particularly television, present a rich array of social role portrayals which may affect the audience. Numerous content analysis studies have documented the amount and nature of minority group depictions in the mass media. These descriptions provide a basis for developing predictions about the possible impact on the audience, particularly children and adolescents. Most of the research findings pertains to advertising and news content. Blacks have been the most widely studied minority group.

Entertainment Portrayals

Until the late 1960's, blacks and other minorities were most notable for their invisibility in the mass media. Minorities were largely absent in early movies, and this practice carried over when television appeared in the 1950's; radio dramas and music seldom presented minority performers. Indeed, even Playboy cartoons contained less than 1% black figures (Greenberg and Kahn, 1971).

When these subgroups were portrayed, it was usually in an unflattering fashion. Classic films from "Birth of a Nation" to "Gone With the Wind" offered narrow and disparaging stereotypes of blacks (Colle, 1968). The popular "Amos 'n Andy" radio program featured exaggerated black roles -- lazy, dumb, crooked, conniving, clowning characters played in dialect by white actors. This caricature was transferred intact to the television series, albeit with black actors. Blacks played menial servant roles presumably acceptable to white audiences. The short-lived music program starring Nat King Cole never attracted sufficient advertising

support; the first successful black star was Bill Cosby in "I Spy", in 1965 (Civil Rights Commission, 1977).

The stereotypes of Indians (Blood thirsty, drunken savages who seldom won battles) and Orientals (evil villains, laundry workers, or nonaggressive super-wise Charlie Chan) are also familiar.

The growth of the civil rights movement throughout the 1960's was eventually accompanied by a trend toward more frequent and positive media representation of minorities. By 1969, half of all TV dramas contained a black performer (Dominick and Greenberg, 1970). Since that time, about 6 to 9% of all characters in TV shows have been black (Seggar, 1977). Although they are relegated to more minor roles and are in less prestigious occupations (Northcott, Seggar and Hinton, 1975; Seggar and Wheeler, 1973), blacks are portrayed as equally industrious, competent, and physically attractive as whites; blacks are more moral and kind, while whites are more dominant in relationships (Hinton, Seggar, Northcott, and Fontes, 1974). In terms of interracial dominance and control, blacks clearly dominate whites in situation comedies, but the opposite occurs in crime dramas (Lemon, 1977).

Professional sports is one area where blacks have achieved success and prominence. However, a content analysis of commentary by the all-white announcers of pro football games shows a subtle bias against black players. Researchers transcribed comments about 33 pairs of black and white players who were matched by position and accomplishments (e.g., running backs O. J. Simpson and Larry Csonka, and receivers Paul Warfield and Fred Biletnikoff). White players received more favorable references about physical ability, mental ability and achievement off the field; announcers also expressed more sympathy and praise for whites. Announcers more often discussed negative past activities of blacks, and made unfavorable comparisons. Whites were described as more aggressive, with blacks represented as recipient of aggression (Rainville and McCormick, 1977).

Advertising Portrayals

Blacks were even more rare in advertising than entertainment content. In the 1940's and 1950's, they appeared in less than 1% of major magazine ads (Shuey, King, and Griffith, 1953; Kassarjian, 1969), although this proportion crept up to 2% during the 1960's (Cox, 1969-70; Stempel, 1971; Kassarjian, 1969). The few blacks who did appear were entertainers, athletes, or menial servants (Colfax and Steinberg, 1972; Shuey, King, and Griffith, 1953). Newspaper ads showed blacks very sparingly; one researcher searched through 20,000 ads in the New York Times during 1963-1964 and found 11 black faces (Boyenton, 1965).

The big jump occurred from 1967 to 1969, from 2% to 5% in magazine ads (Cox, 1970), and from 5% to 11% in TV commercials (Dominick and Greenberg, 1970). There has been little increase beyond this in the 1970's. These studies show that blacks tend to appear in "crowd scenes" with whites rather than alone or with other blacks in print and broadcast ads (Gulley and Bennett, 1976; Dominick and Greenberg, 1970). The situation in children's Saturday morning is quite different, as one-fifth of the ads contain black characters (Atkin and Heald, 1977).

News Portrayals

The visibility of blacks in the news has been more prominent. By 1970, blacks appeared in 13% of newsmagazine pictures (Stempel, 1971). An analysis of newspaper coverage of comparable fatal campus shootings of white or black students (Kent State vs Jackson State and Southern University) found approximately equal amount of space devoted to each incident (Baran, 1973). Blacks appeared in almost one-fourth of network newscast film segments in the early 1970's, although mostly in nonspeaking roles pertaining to busing, desegregation and other civil rights issues (Roberts, 1973). Nevertheless, there are few black TV news correspondents, and they seldom handle the lead stories (Civil Rights Commission, 1977).

The Television Experiences of the Economically Disadvantaged Child

Here we will be concerned with what use the child makes of television both in terms of gross exposure and content selections. Further, it is important to understand the child's perception of television content and its impacts on cognitions, desires and behaviors. We shall offer a preliminary "propositional inventory," in order to categorize the research. We will also report selected findings from our most recent research project, where 600 students in the 4th, 6th and 8th grades were interviewed about television. There were 250 Blacks and 350 Whites in the samples, drawn from the Detroit, Michigan and San Jose, California areas.

One final introductory note is important. Many studies have made comparisons between black and white youngsters without stratifying household income. Of course, this is not synonymous with comparing economically advantaged with disadvantaged youngsters, although in many cases it may be a fairly good approximation of that difference. As demonstrated earlier, any sample of black youth is going to include a far greater proportion of economically disadvantaged children than a comparable sample of white youth. The point is that racial and economic differences are often confounded, both because many studies do not differentiate, and because there is a substantial correlation between the two attributes. There is the additional fact that the poor black is even poorer than the poor white. So when racial differences are noted, e.g., in TV exposure time, the difference may as much represent an intensification of the poverty condition, and its consequences.

1. The economically disadvantaged child is more dependent on television in leisure time allocation.

Studies from both academic and commercial sources persistently demonstrate the greater time allocation to television among the poor -- both for the adults

and the children in their homes. The typical poor home has two working television sets. In a Cleveland study with 400, 9-10 year olds, poor white youngsters reported daily viewing of shows that averaged 6 hours per weekday, compared to 4 hours for the better-off children; the poor black children averaged 7 hours. The poor children were more likely to watch TV before going to school, in the morning, during their lunch hour, after school and in the late evening. In a Philadelphia study with 300 ghetto and suburban high school students, the middle-class white teenager was giving 3 1/2 hours Sunday to TV, in contrast with 4 1/2 hours for the poorer whites, and 6 hours for the poor black adolescents (Greenberg and Dervin, 1972).

National data confirm this pattern and demonstrate an additional point as well. In the last decade, Nielsen data show that overall television watching has increased -- among all homes. But what is the state of national viewing within low income households? In the Nielsen household sample, four income stratifications are made: Incomes less than $5,000 annually; $5,000-$9,000; $10,000-$14,999; and $15,000+. A break-out was made for homes with children, by household income. The poorest homes averaged four more hours a week (200 hours a year) than the best-off families. Among teens (12-17 years of age), the relationship is even stronger. The poorest homes average 12 1/2 hours more per week of television watching than those more well-to-do.

We shall suggest that these estimates are deflated, if anything. The data from the youngsters in the Nielsen sample are derived from their parents. Parents' estimates and reports of their children's viewing behaviors are consistently lower than self-reports of the children. The mother may underestimate the child's viewing time because her values so direct; the child may overestimate for the same reason.

Some claim that the context of viewing television is one which stimulates conversation among family members. Surely, there is some, but little evidence to suggest it as either important or constructive (Lyle and Hoffman, 1971). The interaction between parent and child is perhaps more likely to be negative than positive, e.g., "Shut up, so I can hear," "Go to bed," "It's bad -- don't watch." The increasing incidence of multiple-set households further eliminates the opportunity for social interaction among family members during joint viewing times. And low-income houses are almost as likely as the less poor to have two working TV sets.

Consider then the typical school age disadvantaged child. Each day, seven hours are consumed by going to, coming from and being in school, 8-9 hours are spent abed, 4-5 hours go to television, 1-2 hours to other media activities. Considering these as primary activities, rather than secondary ones, which appears to be the case, we are reduced to identifying what is done with the remaining one or two hours. Maximum variance has already been accounted for.

2. Content selectivity is less prevalent among economically disadvantaged youngsters.

The child we are focusing on is more likely to watch more of whatever is available (Greenberg, 1972). This child is in the audience for more different times of the day, and for more different programs. These are not preference statements, they do not bear on what the child likes to see. But it is conclusive that disadvantaged children watch more of almost everything, rather than concentrating their greater exposure in a select set of programming categories.

In Nielsen audience data, the audience size among low-income 2-11 year olds, as compared with all 2-11 year olds, is larger for 8 of 10 programming categories, and the same for the remaining two, sports shows and quiz/game shows. It is impressively larger for news shows in particular.

There are some useful distinctions to be made, however, in terms of what they would prefer to watch, even though preferences may be less important than actual behavior. However, preferences may have distinct programming implications.

Racial differences predominate in program preference studies, moreso than income differences. Minority children (and adults) express a strong affinity for those shows which regularly feature minority actors and actresses. For example, in Washington, D.C., "Sanford and Son" received a metro black household rating of 69 for eight weeks in 1974, while the same show had a total household rating of 35. In Chicago, the same show had respective ratings of 69 and 34; in Detroit, they were 74 and 41. In all three cities, "Flip Wilson" was among the top six shows for black households, and not in the top 10 among total households.

There are some interesting differences which have been identified between the program type preferences of lower and middle-income children. One focuses on the affinity for violence-filled shows. The economically disadvantaged child watches more of these shows, and likes them more. In perhaps a more constructive sense, the favorite shows of lower-class children are far more likely to be shows in which a family setting exists, in which some parent and child function together. These appear high on the list of favorite program choices for the disadvantaged youngster, and are most often in the family situation comedy genre.

One other aspect of content selectivity is the relative inertia found in initially turning on the set, selecting a program and changing a channel. Among the younger children, black children report more often that the set is turned on by someone other than themselves. But these same children are more likely to say that if there is nothing on they want to watch, they keep on watching anyhow. Children in lower-income homes are more likely to turn the set on, then flip channels looking for something they like. For the low-income, content selection is more random, or less purposive.

3. The economically disadvantaged child is more accepting of television messages.

Across several studies, the proposition that the more disadvantaged are less critical of television content is supported with near-uniform consistency (Greenberg and Reeves, 1976). Here are some samplings of these findings:

The economically disadvantaged child is more likely to believe a television report than a report from any other mass medium;

The same child is more willing to forego other media behaviors if a choice must be made among media;

The same child attributes more credibility to television news people than to newspersons from other media.

In some other belief areas, the same pattern emerges:

Minority students perceive television to be more fair to minority groups than do majority group children;

TV commercials are more likely to be believed among lower-income and/or minority youngsters. For instance, a recent study by Atkin presented two breakfast cereal commercials to 4 and 7 year old children. Half were from low-income Mexican-American neighborhoods, and half came from white middle-class homes. The Mexican-American children were far more likely to trust in the nutritional expertise of the cartoon characters (Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble) who endorsed a pre-sweetened cereal, were more likely to believe the implied claim that sugared cereal would make them big and strong, were more likely to feel that these cereals were more fun and healthful, and were more influenced by the persuasive arguments presented in the commercials.

Running throughout these discrete statements is the general idea that television entertainment content in general is more likely to be judged true-to-life. Some responses from our recent survey illustrates the extent to which minority

children perceive that fictional portrayals are realistic. The question asked if the child agreed with each statement; the percentages indicate how many children of each race selected the "yes" choice (approximately 30% to 40% additional children indicated that they were "not sure", so the proportions below underestimate the degree of belief in the reality of TV):

	Blacks	Whites
Black men/women I see on TV are like black men/women in real life	29%	25%
Blacks on TV talk like blacks in real life	46%	42%
Blacks on TV behave like blacks in real life	26%	15%
Black teenagers on TV are like black teenagers in real life	41%	33%
The jobs men/women do on TV are like the jobs men/women do in real life	60%	52%
Mothers/fathers on TV are like mothers/fathers in real life	38%	25%
Wives/husbands...like real life	26%	17%
Teenage boys/girls...like real life	41%	31%
Men/women...like real life	30%	28%
Families...like real life	22%	21%
Police officers/doctors/secretaries/nurses... like real life	44%	37%

It can be seen that the black youth consistently felt that the TV portrayals were more real, although the differences are not large. Why? The restrictions of home and environment permit fewer alternative personal and communication experiences. The school facility is often an educational relic with children whose lives are equally deprived. Fewer activities take place outside the school grounds. Direct contacts with the outside world are very limited. Many primary contacts with

outside phenomena are likely to be television contacts, against which few standards of comparison are available. Although this explanation may be an over-statement, it merits consideration.

4. The disadvantaged child is more likely to come to television to "learn" something.

Watching television serves many functions for viewers. Among these are an opportunity to relax, to get some excitement, to find diversion from in-home or out-of-home unpleasantries, to pass time, and to combat loneliness (Greenberg, 1974). But the most repeated finding is that the low-income child expects to learn something from his television experiences. This child anticipates that learning will occur primarily in ways that will be socially adaptive. The results of our survey illustrate this basic point:

> Proportion of youth saying that they watch TV to learn how different people behave, talk, dress, and look:
>
> Whites: 38% Blacks: 50%
>
> Proportion saying that they watch TV to learn what police, doctors, secretaries, and nurses are like:
>
> Whites: 39% Blacks: 52%

Learning is a motivation that undoubtedly interacts with the other experiences and psychological postures of this child in facing television. The child is receptive, positive, eager and believing.

5. Disadvantaged children display a higher level of involvement in television programming.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be more emotionally involved in the plots of programs, and to identify more closely with characters. This is especially true for responses to black characters on TV. Black youth were approximately three times as likely to express identification with black characters, compared to white youth. These are findings from our social role survey:

Role models selected by children (Which characters do you want to be like?)

Percent saying YES	Black children	White children
Freddy Washington	57%	27%
Lamont Sanford	45%	13%
J. J. Evans	45%	19%
Bill Cosby	43%	15%
Thelma Evans	43%	7%
George Jefferson	41%	8%
Dee Thomas	37%	17%
Louise Jefferson	30%	6%
Roger Thomas	28%	11%
James Evans	29%	4%
Mrs. Thomas	22%	5%
Florida Evans	21%	3%
AVERAGE FOR 12 BLACK CHARACTERS	37%	11%

For white TV characters, blacks and whites are equally likely to identify. Averaging across 26 white TV characters, 17% of black youth vs. 16% of white say they want to be like the character. Thus, black children relate to a larger number of characters, because they identify with both black and white actors.

6. Disadvantaged children do learn from watching television.

There is no argument among researchers or educators about this premise. The argument begins when one turns to such questions as whether they learn more or less, whether it is constructive learning or not, and just what the content of the learning is.

Cognitive learning from television has been most ably demonstrated from the research done in conjunction with the Sesame Street programs (Bogatz and

Ball, 1971). This program was created for the disadvantaged youngster. Research results from the first and second years of that show clearly indicate that the more a disadvantaged youngster watched the program, the more that child learned the skills and information emphasized in the programs. And this large amount of learning did not require adult supervision, was picked up as well by home viewing as by in-school viewing, and was even more impressive among the younger viewers than the older ones. But each of these results was obtainable among the more advantaged child viewers as well. That is, Sesame Street was not a teacher solely for the disadvantaged; it taught the more advantaged child at least equally. The paradox is this: If a disadvantaged child watches more of Sesame Street than an advantaged one, the former learns more, and the cognitive gap between them tends to lessen; however, if an advantaged and a disadvantaged child both watch a larger number of programs, the former -- because of what has already gone into making that child an advantaged one -- learns more of what is available and the gap between them may increase. Recent analyses by Cook (1975) indicate that Sesame Street may indeed serve to widen the gap.

Another instance of the widespread use of television for straightforward learning was the creation of Electric Company. Significant positive gains in reading skills were found in grades one through four among program adopters. Gains were largest in grades one and two presumably because of higher entry skills in the upper grades. The impact of in-school viewing of Electric Company was similar for several subgroups tested, including Chicano children, black children, white children, and boys and girls (Ball and Bogatz, 1973).

Parallel programs specially designed for ethnic subgroups, e.g., Carrascolendas, have been equally impressive in their abilities to teach rudimentary learning skills among the very young.

Often these same shows teach other things as well. Sesame Street and Mister Rogers, for example, have had such specific pro-social consequences as increased cooperation and sharing behaviors, task persistence, and tolerance for delay among more regular viewers. More positive attitude toward school and toward other races have been also documented. In one major study, pro-social interpersonal behavior (cooperative play, nurturance, verbalization of feeling) increased only among children from poor families. The higher SES children did not increase their pro-social behavior from watching Mister Rogers (Stein and Friedrich, 1972).

Greenberg (1972) asked white elementary school children to identify where they obtained most of their knowledge about the physical appearance, talk, and dress of blacks. Those with infrequent personal contact with black people relied principally on television. Among rural children who seldom lived near or attended school with blacks, two-thirds reported that television was their basic information source. One-third of the suburban youth cited TV; urban children, who had extensive contact with blacks, were least likely to rely on television inputs.

According to the self-reports of young blacks and whites in our sample, TV is a major source of learning about the world. In particular, job roles and behavior patterns are learned from television.

Proportion of youth saying that they learn most of what they know about these topics from television:

	Whites	Blacks
Jobs that men and women have	35%	47%
How men and women make decisions	21%	34%
How men and women solve problems	29%	42%
How parents and children interact	44%	57%
How husbands and wives interact	33%	45%

	Whites	Blacks
How teenagers act	37%	48%
Police, doctors, secretaries, nurses	35%	41%
How black people dress, behave, talk	23%	40%

Affective learning from TV has also been amply demonstrated as far back as the early 1930's, researchers were seeking to discover the impact of films on social attitudes. Researchers showed children a movie with distinctive racial themes such as Birth of a Nation, and found that it significantly changed their attitudes toward black people (Peterson and Thurstone, 1933).

Contemporary researchers have focused attention on the top-rated TV program of the 1970's, All in the Family. A secondary objective of this program was to combat bigotry by poking fun at it and helping viewers gain insight into their own prejudices. However, the selective perception process seems to prevail with this type of satirical content. Several investigators have reported that authoritarian, prejudiced individuals tend to literally interpret the actions of the bigoted character, Archie Bunker. When Archie expresses an ethnic or racial slur, these viewers agree with him and feel he is "telling it like it is." Less prejudiced members of the audience perceive Archie as a foolish, narrow-minded bigot and interpret his comments as satire. Thus, there is a tendency for selective perception to distort the intended message toward the predispositions of viewers, resulting in reinforcement of prior prejudices or tolerances (Vidmar and Rokeach, 1974; Tate and Surlin, 1976; Chapko and Lewis, 1975, Surlin, 1974; Brigham, 1975; Wilhoit and de Bock, 1976; Brigham and Giesbrecht, 1976). Apparently, the producers cast Archie as too lovable, allowing many individuals to identify with him. Even so, just a small proportion feel Archie's views are valid and appropriate, which minimizes the unintended effect. Furthermore, a substantial number of viewers report that the program helps them to recognize their own

prejudices (Vidmar and Rokeach, 1974) and makes them less certain about their ethnocentric ideas (Wilhoit and de Bock, 1976). Finally, the reinforcement effect also works to reduce prejudice for those who are already predisposed toward a tolerant viewpoint.

Two studies of young viewers of Sesame Street suggest that positive racial attitude change can be produced. This program seeks to foster favorable affect toward blacks, orientals, and Native Americans by frequently presenting appealing models from these minority groups. A field survey indicated that white children who viewed two years of Sesame Street became more positive toward other races (Bogatz and Ball, 1971). An experiment in an all-white nursery school manipulated exposure to Sesame Street segments containing non-white persons. When asked if they wanted to play with white or non-white children pictured in photographs, just one-third of the unexposed control group picked the minority playmates. More than two-thirds of those who had seen the multiracial segments preferred to play with the minority children; the vicarious contact appears to have heightened interest and increased familiarity with these minority groups (Gorn, Goldberg, and Kanungo, 1976).

Some observers have predicted that black children who are exposed to white-dominated media content will develop destructive self-images and perceptions of white superiority, but no evidence is available (Hinton, Seggar, Northcott and Fontes, 1973). There are experiments showing that young black children are more likely to imitate the play behavior of televised white models than black models (Neely, Heckel, and Leichtman, 1973; Atkin, 1975). Similarly, others have expressed concern about the effects of certain types of black portrayals, such as the Super Fly characterizations in "Blaxploitation" films. They argue that ghetto youth who have few positive real-life models to emulate are susceptible to the superficially

glamorous portrayals of violence, sex, and drugs in black-oriented films. Clearly, some viewers copy hair and dress styles and mimic distinctive "hip" words and deeds of movie heroes, but systematic data on this influence is lacking (Poussaint, 1974).

On a more positive note, one experimenter found that the self-concept of black children was enhanced after watching a one-hour movie depicting successful black athletes, entertainers, soldiers, and families (Dimas, 1970).

Children learn some less desirable things from a steady diet of commercial television. They learn more aggressive traits if they watch a steady diet of televised violence, and research demonstrates that the programs which contain heavier doses of such content are among the show categories more favored and watched by the disadvantaged. The child who views regularly is more likely to accept violence as a mode of conflict resolution, is more likely to consider violence an effective problem-solver, and expresses greater willingness to use it. Further, the disadvantaged (by either race or income) perceive less violence in a given unit of content, judge it as more acceptable, enjoy it more, find it more humorous, and judge it as more true-to-life. However, there is no evidence that these attributes develop more strongly from television among the disadvantaged.

Another commercial content area with both attitudinal and behavioral impacts on the disadvantaged is that of advertising. Disadvantaged children more often ask for and get (or complain if they don't) commercially advertised products, such as cereals, according to their self-reports and those of their mothers. Here, the point to emerge is that television is a most powerful teacher, both formally and informally. It is particularly impressive in those content areas where the viewer has a particular void. And the less advantaged child clearly has more voids than the more advantaged child.

7. Parents of disadvantaged children take an active role in their children's television viewing.

First, black young people in our sample experience closer control over television exposure than white respondents. One-third said that their parents "make more rules about TV" compared to most kids their age, while one-fifth of the whites reported this. Half of each group said that their parents "almost always" knew what programs they are watching, and a higher proportion of blacks said their parents "care very much" about the shows they watch. In addition, the black youth are no more likely to be allowed to stay up late to watch TV on school days, and they have just as much prohibition against watching programs that parents don't approve.

Second, parents of black youngsters are more likely to provide guidance toward approved programs on television. For a set of four programs featuring black performers (Good Times, Sanford and Son, The Jeffersons, and Fat Albert), an average of 40% of the black parents vs. 22% of the white parents suggested that their child should watch. For other 'pro-social' programs (e.g., Little House on the Prairie, The Waltons, Rhoda), about one-fifth of both the white and black youth received guidance. Black parents are more likely than white parents to direct their child's viewing toward police shows such as Police Woman and The Rookies.

Third, black parents are somewhat more likely to actually sit down and watch TV programs with their children. This is especially the case for black programs, where more than 80% of the black parents watch with their child. For 37 of 46 programs studied, a higher proportion of black than white youth reported their parents watched with them. The difference averaged 10 to 15% higher for black youth.

Fourth, black and white parents provide equivalent amounts of interpretation of television depictions. About two-fifths of the black and white youth said that their parents tell them about the real and unreal elements in televised portrayals of occupations, family roles, racial roles, and sex roles.

A Research Agenda

Now that we have isolated critical factors about television and the minority and/or disadvantaged child, we can begin to create focal research issues.

The research program we propose addresses this question: What do youngsters acquire from fictional portrayals that may establish or alter cognitions, aspirations, expectations and beliefs about specific social roles. Understanding the social role learning which occurs as a function of television portrayals will serve (1) to underscore the significance of social learning by young people, and (2) to identify a research process that can be replicated with other social role content areas of national import, e.g., portrayals of the elderly, portrayals of the sexes.

These are the specific social role attitude consequences of television viewing that are of central interest:

Cognitions about a particular role. What does the viewer believe to be true about that social role? How much variance does the youngster perceive to exist or be permitted for a specific social role?

Valuation of roles and role attributes. What role attributes or behaviors does the youngster value, and for what reason? What preferences develop?

Development of role aspirations. What roles are aspired to, from television, through anticipatory socialization?

Expectations about role-appropriate behaviors. How is a role-holder expected to behave? How is this expectation affected by the discrepancy between the television role-holder and role-holders directly experienced?

Behavior toward role holders. How do youngsters behave differently toward role-holders because of images shaped by television?

There are two basic rationales for studying social role learning about blacks. The first is to demonstrate the need for understanding white children's responses to black portrayals, and the second is to examine black chlldren's responses to black portrayals.

To the extent that whites develop impressions, expectations, and beliefs about black people from television portrayals of blacks, there are important implications for the cross-racial socialization of young people in this country. In the context of planned integration of schools in urban areas and some accompanying conflicts between white and black youths, it seems imperative to examine if, and how, the media contribute to a lessening or heightening of inter-racial tensions. To what extent is the urban white child's beliefs about blacks shaped conjointly by personal and television experiences? Are the television portrayals generally reacted to as realistic or ridiculous? Do these youngsters find any of the black portrayals particularly attractive and worthy of emulation? To what extent is there cross-race identification with television characters and the behaviors of those characters? These are the issues for whites who live in urban areas, who have direct experiences with black youths, and who are exposed to fictional television portrayals of blacks.

At the same time, millions of white children are growing up in a nonintegrated environment, in small and medium-sized cities with no appreciable minority population and virtually no minority peers in their schools. It is here that we would expect maximum minority role information to be transmitted by the media, and by television in particular. It is television which far exceeds all other media in terms of time allocation among adolescents. Racial impressions may not be very important

until such young people reach adolescence and begin to be aware of people who look and perhaps behave in ways different from those to which they are accustomed. Thus, the extent to which television 'teaches' segregated white children about the way blacks behave, interact, look, and think can have significant implications for what these white youngsters expect and believe to be true about blacks. For this white sub-group, isolated from direct experiences with substantial numbers of minority people, it is particularly important to determine the quantity and quality of vicarious information received through that mass medium which they deem most credible and with which they share so much of their leisure time.

Equally, if not more importantly, to what extent are the black models aspired to by black youngsters? This third focus of concern deals with the issue of racial self-concept. It is important to determine if black children identify with and choose as role models some of those black heroes and heroines, or other main characters portrayed on television programs. Do blacks exposed to such role models believe that the industry is making an effort at integration through such presentations? Does persistent exposure to such models instill greater racial awareness and an increment in racial pride or in self-pride? Does it generate more positive expectations about the social and professional acceptance of blacks by whites? Does it make for more cordial relations with white schoolmates? If those characters are judged to be negative, to be counter-productive to black goals for self-achievement, then it is equally important to determine whether the perceptions of black television portrayals generate increased hostile attitudes toward whites. If the characters are judged by black adolescents to be stereotypical of black people, then the social learning can result in more negative inter-racial responses.

Some other issues might also be examined. Do black children increase or decrease personal efficacy after seeing minority characters in dominant or subordinate roles on television? Can TV provide access to varied social roles (e.g., occupational options, geographic mobility, middle class lifestyles) beyond the direct experience of the disadvantaged child, and thus facilitate the development of empathy with a wider range of potential aspired roles? (Can this empathy extend to a greater understanding of the attitudes and actions of whites?) Do TV portrayals heighten aspirations -- and if so, will unfulfilled aspirations result in eventual dissatisfaction and frustration when society can't provide full access? Finally, how do minority children respond to instances where their race is an object of ridicule, as in programs that ostensibly satirize bigotry -- and how do they respond when minority TV characters display negative feelings toward white characters?

Thus, the three target groups for social learning of black television portrayals are significant for quite different reasons.

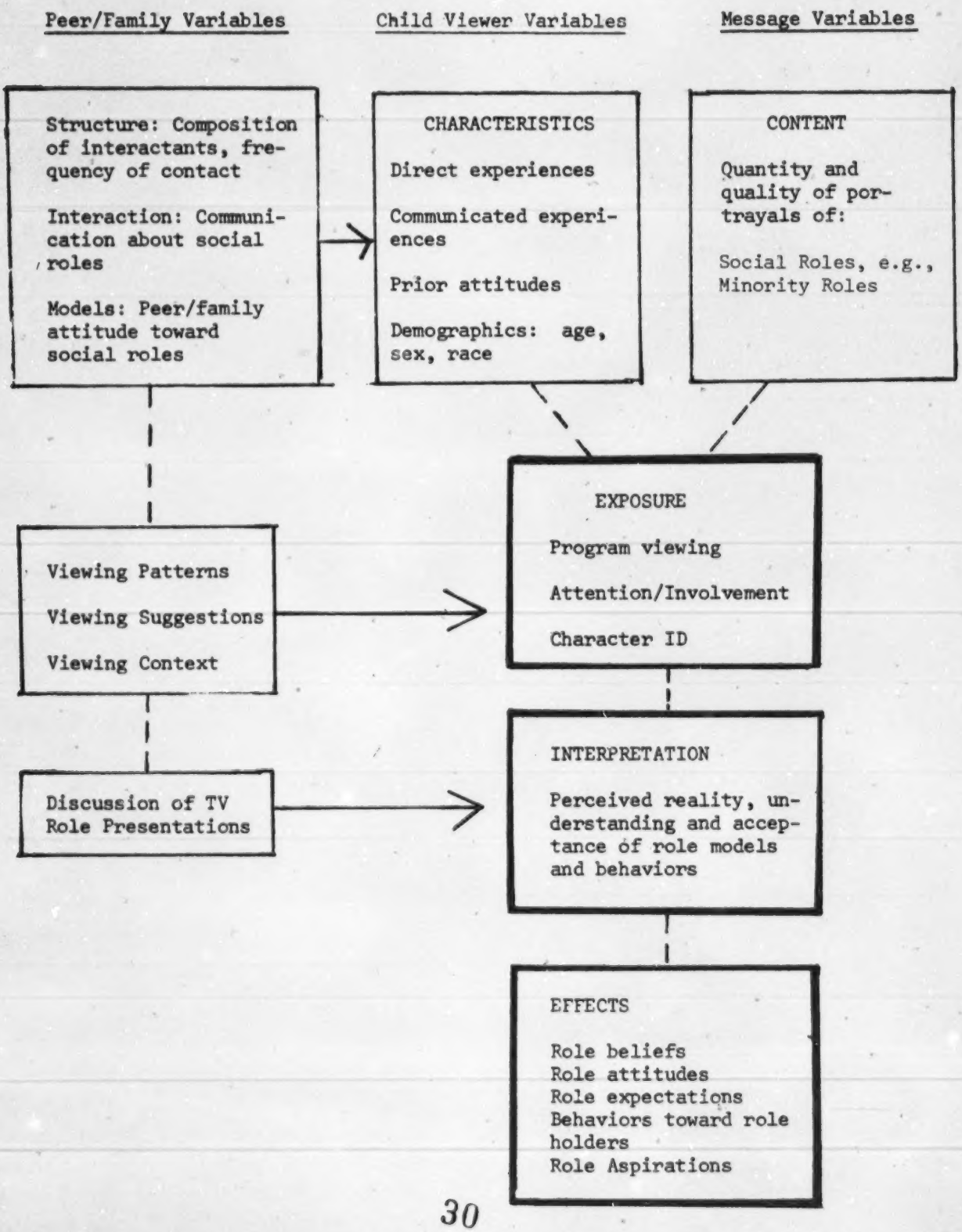
Our conceptualization of the general process of acquiring social role orientations from television is primarily derived from Bandura's social learning theory (1977). This perspective posits imitative performance of vicariously reinforced stimuli observed directly or via television. According to Bandura, many role models presented on television are highly effective in attracting children's attention because they are relevant, powerful, competent, distinctive, attractive, and readily accessible. Since these models are featured frequently and pervasively, children's retention of images and symbols is also enhanced. The learned messages are likely to be activated into overt expression because the portrayed reinforcement contingencies provide instigational cues. Three modeling functions constitute significant mechanisms for learning from TV.

Observational learning is the transmission of information about ways of organizing component responses into new patterns of behavior; observers acquire novel responses by watching the performances of televised models. The pictorial demonstrations available on television are particularly powerful for younger viewers with less developed conceptual skills and motivation to learn from verbal sources. The second function involves strengthening or weakening inhibitions that govern the expression of previously learned responses. The observation of reinforcement to a model helps determine how behavioral restraints are modified; vicariously punished responses tend to inhibit expression while normally prohibited responses that are rewarded or merely ignored reduce inhibitory constraints. Response facilitation, the third major function, occurs when the model performs a socially sanctioned behavior which serves as an external reminder eliciting performance of the viewer's existing responses in the same general class.

A large amount of research evidence compiled over the past two decades has demonstrated that television has significant effects on youthful viewers; hundreds of these studies have been reviewed in annotated bibliographies by Atkin et. al. (1971) and Comstock (1975). The research yields a very complex picture of these effects. The characteristics that the youth brings to television combine with the attributes of the television content to produce varying types of exposure, interpretation, and consequences. The social context of the viewer has important implications for the predispositions of the viewer and his responses to television. The general proposition that consumption of televised messages will produce corresponding changes in the role orientations of adolescents is contingent on the juxtaposition of TV content factors, viewer characteristics, and social influences, and patterns of exposure and interpretation. A schematic outline of the key variables is presented in Figure 1 on the next page.

Figure 1

Model of Key Variables in Social Role Learning From TV



A comprehensive and sensitive analysis of television effects must consider all components of this model. The first stage is a careful measurement of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of televised portrayals of social roles through content analytic techniques. Before one can determine the outcomes of exposure, the exact dimensions of the message imputs must be assessed. The prior experiences, attitudes, and demographic attributes of the young viewer must also be considered, along with the interpersonal stimuli that shaped each predisposition. The measurement of exposure must include indices of message contact and psychological responses while viewing. Interpretive reactions which serve as intervening processes must also be ascertained. Social inputs that affect the nature of the viewing experience must be tapped. Finally, the rich array of cognitive, affective and behavioral learning must be fully measured.

General hypotheses:

Five general predictions can be framed to guide research in social role learning from television. These are tied to the five dependent variables outlined previously.

H_1 -- Young people exposed to programs containing systematic portrayal of specific social roles will acquire cognitions reflecting the elements of the televised presentation; compared to non-exposed or light viewers, heavy viewers will hold perceptions of actual attributes and behavior patters of roleholders that are consistent with the televised version. For instance, heavy viewers of programs featuring women police officers will be more likely than light viewers to perceive that a higher proportion of real-life police are female.

H_2 -- Young people exposed to programs containing role portrayals that systematically project favorable or unfavorable stereotypes will tend to develop values of roles and role attributes that correspond to the televised presentation, compared to those less extensively exposed. For instance, those who regularly watch programs featuring a strong and hardworking black mother figure will be more likely to hold a favorable attitude toward black mothers.

H_3 -- Young people exposed to programs featuring consistently favorable portrayals of achieved roles will tend to aspire toward holding such role positions, and exposed adolescents will tend to have lower aspirations from unfavorably portrayed roles. For instance, those who frequently watch programs presenting flattering depictions of defense attorneys will be more likely to aspire to this occupation than less heavily exposed adolescents.

H_4 -- Young people exposed to programs portraying regularities in behavior patterns of role-holders will tend to develop expectations that real-life role-holders will behave in that manner. For instance, those who often see black television judges acting fairly and authoritatively will be more likely to anticipate that actual black judges that they encounter will act that way.

H_5 -- Viewers' behavior toward real-life role-holders is expected to be influenced by the perceptions, attitudes, and expectations that are shaped by the TV role portrayals.

Interaction hypotheses

Beyond these main hypotheses, more precise predictions can be stated that take into account the attributes of the youngster who receives the message. Those attributes central to this presentation are in Figure 1. Let us identify some illustrative hypotheses which a literature review would suggest as the expected role in the television exposure-social role learning relationship.

Parental and peer influence.

Television's impact will be lessened if the youngster is exposed to interpersonal messages which are contradictory and frequent; its impact will be facilitated to the extent such interpersonal messages do not exist at all; its impact will be moderate if interpersonal sources input similar messages.

Direct experience.

Prior personal experience with role-holders will be related to the impact of television in this fashion:
a. Limited or no prior experience will be related to maximum impact of television material;
b. Prior experiences which are consistent with the television material will reinforce the child's social attitudes and behaviors; attitudes and behaviors based on inconsistent prior experiences will be altered in the direction of the television presentation.

Existing attitudes.

The nature and direction of the young person's existing attitudes toward social roles and behaviors will be related to television learning in these ways:
a. The absence of prior attitudes, or weakly-held prior attitudes, will be related to maximum acceptance of the social role emphases of the television content;
b. Directional prior attitudes will be strengthened if the television themes are consistent, and weakened if they are conflictual.

Needs.

The viewer with manifest or latent needs for information about particular roles and behaviors is more likely to accept what television offers than the child with less need for such information.

Motivations.

The more the child is psychologically dependent on television, the more impact from content:
a. The more the child is motivated to learn about life from television, the greater the impact.
b. The more the adolescent is motivated to learn about self-adaptive behaviors from television, the greater the impact.

Involvement.

Attention to and involvement with the television characterizations will be positively related to the degree of impact of that content.

Perceived reality.

Perceived reality of television content will be positively related to impact.

Overall Research Plan

A comprehensive and definitive examination of the influence of television on role learning requires a combination of controlled experimentation and field survey data. Experimental and quasi-experimental conditions provide for control over the key stimulus variables and a careful observation of dependent variables. Survey methods allow for an assessment of the levels and inter-relationships of many variables in the naturalistic setting where television is viewed, and an exploration of the cumulative impact of television content. A key prerequisite for these behavioral research phases is a thorough knowledge of the kinds of social role portrayals existing in current television programming, obtained through sophisticated content analysis techniques. Let us exemplify a prototype research plan that extends over a two-year period. This will permit the use of more sophisticated design procedures thatn the more typical one-shot study, and enable us to examine critical components of the proposed research model. For purposes of illustration,

we shall focus on minority role learning by both black and white youngsters. The reader may conceptually substitute other role learning areas of greater personal or theoretic interest; the general approach is suitable to that kind of translation. We would begin with:

1) A content analysis of specific TV character portrayals, i.e., all those black actors or actresses appearing in a continuing prime time (8 to 11 p.m.) or Saturday morning (8 a.m. to 1 p.m.) series, plus all appearances in commercials adjacent to or within these times. This content analysis would be conducted during the fall of a first year of study, and repeated during the fall of the next year, in order to be responsive to possible changes across the beginning of two different television seasons.

Further, these general content analyses would be supplemented during Year 1 by intensive analyses of multiple episodes (3-5) of those shows featuring black characters which a viewing survey identifies as the most regularly-watched among the target age groups. That is, the portrayals of favorite black characters would be examined across time to provide more reliable information as to the characteristic portrayals and behaviors of these characters.

2) A panel design field survey in which black and white children (with age groups to be specified) are personally interviewed in order (1) to assess their levels of exposure to programs which regularly feature blacks, (2) to measure a set of mediating variables, e.g., perceiv reality of blacks on fictional television shows, personal cross-race experiences by the respondents, television dependency and credibility, and (3) to measure their cognitions, attitudes and expectations regarding blacks. These data will be collected at two points in time, in concert with the results of the multi-wave content analyses described above. That is, the content analytic findings will be the basis for a large segment of the specific questioning of these respondents about television blacks.

3) A field experiment in which exposure to black portrayals on television is systematically manipulated for a sub-group of viewers. The basic experiment will be to induce, through incentives, viewing or non-viewing of a specific diet of television programs which feature black characters on a regular basis. The effects of this exposure on specific black image impressions will be assessed. A slightly different approach here would be to choose from syndicated series, a pair of series which present quite different black role models. At one extreme, "Amos and Andy" could be introduced to a group of respondents and viewed for four or five episodes; at a quite different level, "I Spy" might be introduced to a different group of respondents. The idea would be to utilize what appear to be both positive and negative content approaches in the presentation of TV blacks, and determine whether and in what ways they may impact on the key dependent variables.

4) An in-school experiment which specifically manipulates the presentation of black characters in law-abiding and/or law-breaking roles. Over a specific time period, one group would receive TV stimuli which consistently depict blacks in law-abiding portrayals, a second group will receive stimuli consistently depicting blacks in law-breaking portrayals, and a third group will receive a combination of the two types of portrayals. The specific purpose of this experiment would be to determine to what extent the expectations of white and black youngsters toward blacks in these specific social roles can be structured by such consistent role portrayals. The choice of law-abiding or law-breaking contrasts is illustrative. Any number of other pairings is possible, e.g., strong, black women vs. weak black women, blacks as professionals vs. blacks in lesser occupational roles, blacks in integrated settings vs. blacks in segregated settings.

Now, we shall elaborate each of these research approaches.

Content analysis of television portrayals of blacks:

It is possible to anticipate that the typical week of prime-time and Saturday morning television will portray about 100 black TV characters. It was 101 in the 1975-76 television season content analysis (Simmons, et al, 1977), from approximately 1,200 speaking portrayals. It was an identical figure in our analysis of this TV season.

The major roles depicted by blacks on television would be the focus of a content analysis. Those programs which regularly feature black actors and actresses in leading roles are likely to be primary sources of information about blacks for young, white viewers, and primary role models for young, black viewers. For example, during 1976-77, the networks featured blacks in such programs as "Good Times," "The Jeffersons," "Sanford and Son," "What's Happening," and "Fat Albert." Multiple episodes of these series would be taped and subjected to a systematic content analysis. These shows will be supplemented by series which regularly feature a black performer in a major role, but in which the entire show is not cast in a black context; e.g., the black warrant officer on "CPO Sharkey," the black bar owner on "Starsky and Hutch."

A content analysis should not be directed entirely at the sheer incidence of occurrence of minority characters, but more specifically at whether those featured minority characters typically convey consistent impressions and images regarding selected behavioral activities. In particular:

(a) Family roles: The mothers in the situation comedies set with black families typically are domineering decision-makers, and highly verbally agressive. If content analysis verifies this impression, then it is possible to examine whether such content impacts on the images of black mothers among young viewers.

(b) Language patterns: In the black-oriented situation comedies, the teenage children and even younger children often engage in language behaviors that

are not found in other programs. Does this occur frequently enough to suggest that viewers "expect" black youngsters to deviate substantially in language behaviors? Do viewers pick up these linguistic specialties?

(c) Integration: Our prior analyses of television shows indicate that the large majority of regular black performers appear on shows that are virtually all-black. If this content pattern persists, it suggests a need to determine whether young viewers believe blacks "do" or "should" stick together.

(d) Social Class: All the shows which feature groups of blacks, save for "The Jeffersons," do so in a distinctly working class or lower class context. Just how blacks are portrayed by social class in other programs can be further identified in the content analysis. But such a consistency in portrayal may be echoed in viewer expectations regarding the appropriate social class portrayal of blacks, or lead young black viewers to diminished aspirations for their own future.

(e) Identification: Several of the shows prominently feature young black performers; e.g., J.J. on "Good Times." The content analysis will include an intensive examination of the behaviors, problem-solving methods, and attributes of each young black actor and actress. To the extent that the TV characters are evaluated positively, behavioral modeling is more likely. The content analysis should attempt to identify prominent behaviors, determine their persistency across characters, and then trace their presence/absence in subsequent field studies.

These sample likely topics for content analysis. Here is a more comprehensive set:

(a) Demography: sheer frequency of blacks in the population of television characters; sex distribution; age; social class; occupational diversity; parent status; marital status.

(b) Social role behaviors: family roles; job performance; pro-social behaviors; anti-social behaviors; sex role behaviors; in-home activities; out-of-home activities.

(c) Social interaction behaviors: giving orders; taking orders; affiliative behaviors; competetive behaviors; superior, subordinate and horizontal relationships.

(d) Race-related behaviors: discussions and references to race; appearances in integrated and segregated interpersonal settings; use of non-standard English and race-related slang.

(e) Personal attributes: hero-heroine vs villain; sympathetic or non-sympathetic characterizatien; problem-solver or problem-maker; humorous or not; object of ridicule or not; object of affection or not.

Other aspects of the content analysis must be permitted to come inductively from the preliminary screenings of the available character portrayals.

Panel survey of black social role learning: A critical aspect of this research project is the direct linkage between the results of the content analysis of television programming and social role learning in the viewer. Traditional studies of the effects of television content typically take gross measures of viewing time or program exposure and attempt to link such general viewing patterns to resultant attitudes and behaviors. What is proposed here would tie the information from the content analysis of specific characterizations to exposure to programs featuring those characterizations. Program exposure can be weighted by such attributes as the regularity of occurrence or the persistency of occurrence of social role phenomenon under study, and by the valence attached to that attribute in the programming. All this is expected to yield a more sensitive estimate of the impact of television content than would be possible by using sheer show exposure as the primary basis for gauging television's impact. (See Figure 2).

	An Analysis of TV Content for Role Information		Content Exposure by Target Audience		Role-Related Learning
CONCEPTUAL	Incidence of occurrence Valence of occurrence	X	Regularity of viewing Involvement Attention Perceived Reality	=	Role cognitions Role expectations Role valuations Role aspirations Behavior toward role holder
OPERATIONAL DEFINITION	Frequency of black portrayals across sub-set of programs Frequency of portrayal of black criminals and black law enforcers	X	Exposure to shows which frequently contain such episodes (i.e., Starsky and Hutch, Future Cop) Liking for the show Judged realism of portrayals	=	Perceived incidence of black criminals and black law enforcers in real life Attitudes toward blacks Anxiety about black criminals Respect for black law enforcers Expectations about blacks as criminals or law enforcers

Figure 2

A panel survey is proposed here to test the impact of television blacks on white adolescents' beliefs, attitudes, expectations and behaviors about blacks, and on black adolescents' racial self-concept and role aspirations. The hypotheses developed in this section of the research scheme are based largely on prior content analyses of black performances on commercial television, e.g., characters are far more likely to be portrayed with multiples of their own race than with other races, social class is distinctly lower for blacks. In contrast, the sheer incidence of blacks has increased and those instances now include several major portrayals, so that wider opportunities exist for identification with blacks.

Given the recent representation of blacks on television, according to content analysis results and our literature review, available information is expected to affect the ways in which white children perceive black roles, for example:

H_1: Compared to infrequent viewers, white children who regularly view programs which feature black characters will:

(a) expect black mothers to be more aggressive and domineering;
(b) expect black teen-agers to be cockier;
(c) expect black fathers to be louder and more abrasive;
(d) believe that blacks are more likely to use non-standard English;
(e) believe that blacks are more likely to associate primarily with blacks;
(f) believe that blacks are likely to be in funnier situations; and
(g) believe that blacks are more likely to be lower in social class.

In a related manner, the perceptions, attitudes and preferences of blacks may be shaped in the following way:

H_2: Compared to infrequent viewers, black children who regularly view programs which feature black characters will:

(a) perceive more blacks on television;
(b) be more likely to choose black TV characters as role models; e.g.,
(c) will be more favorable twoard the presentations of blacks;
(d) believe that black families work together to solve problems;
(e) believe that black mothers are better family problem-solvers; and
(f) be more dissatisfied with their current social status.

Finally, according to the earlier discussion of Clark's stages of minority representations on television, TV's portrayal of blacks may now be entering a period of transition between the regulatory (law-related characterizations) and the respect (more diversity) stages. This can be tested with regard to attitudinal effects on both white and black children:

H_3: Over time, white children who are exposed to black television portrayals will tend to have more respect for blacks in general; and

H_4: Over time, black children who are exposed to black television portrayals will tend to have a higher "racial self-esteem" and to become somewhat more negative, at least initially, toward whites.

Study design: A white sample of 300 young people who are largely isolated from direct experiences and personal contacts with blacks, and an integrated black and white sample (n = 500) would be utilized in this proposed study. The white isolated sample enables us to assess whether television black portrayals are used as a primary source of information by white youngsters, and the type of role images and attitudes derived from such characterizations. This subsample would provide the opportunity for controlling direct experiences with blacks, and to more precisely estimate the impact of changing television representations.

The integrated sample, derived from urban communities where the schools have been integrated, would provide the opportunity to assess the relative impact of real life contact with blacks. In other words, here we have the opportunity to compare integrated and isolated white samples, in a quasi-experimental fashion.

In addition, the integrated sample, with 50% black children, would provide the respondents necessary for testing hypotheses related to black adolescents' "racial self-concept" as a result of their exposure to television blacks.

Field experiment in black social role learning: Among the images television provides about blacks are those related to family roles, e.g., expectations about what mothers and fathers do, how children behave with and toward each other, who is the decision-maker. It is especially the case that in the last two television seasons those shows that have included more than a single featured black performer have been situation comedies with a black family as the basic unit. Two seasons ago, this included "That's My Mama," and the current season has included, "What's Happening," and "Good Times." This singular focus severely limits the dramatic inputs both white children and black ones receive about blacks from television. and may have implications for both groups of youths. These family shows featuring black family units are the focus of this illustrative field experiment. Again, our particular selection of content for this field experiment is arbitrary. Other selections are equally viable.

For whites, TV inputs regarding black families may have serious implications for the way they view black families and the children within those families. With limited inputs provided by television, the white adolescent may be affected in ways that influence his/her interactions with black peers at school, out of school, and may develop into expectations that carry through to adulthood. As with other role portrayals, these family roles are expected to have a direct impact on viewers' expectations and beliefs about black families, especially on white youngsters with limited exposure to black families. However in the same manner, black youngsters watching these black TV families may be experiencing informational inputs that are discrepant from their real-life observations of their own families and those of their friends. It is just as important to determine whether or not black TV family portrayals impact on black youngsters' perceptions about black family structure, interaction, patterns, membership, etc.

Now, let us provide some tentative hypotheses, based on analyzing recent TV content.

In the current television season, there are several programs which contain main characters who are black (e.g., "Good Times," "Sanford Arms," "What's Happening," and "The Jeffersons"). In all these black television family portrayals, the family is usually quite isolated from contact with whites. The opportunity for black-white communication is restricted. Therefore, the viewer exposed to these black programs should more likely expect that:

H_1: Black families have few white friends and acquaintances, keep to their own race, and have fewer interactions with white people.

In terms of mother and father roles, the current programs portray several families without a father role, whereas the mother character typifies the dominant, efficient, effective, decision-maker role characterized by mothers on most black shows. Given this overall image portrayal, the viewers should expect and/or believe that:

H_2: Black families are more likely to be without a father.

H_3: Black mothers are more dominant and make more critical family decisions in black families.

H_4: Black mothers are more dominant and make more critical family decisions than do black fathers.

In the current television fare, the black family is more often portrayed as low in economic status (except "The Jeffersons" who are nouveau riche). Therefore, those who are exposed to black programs should believe that:

H_5: Black families are more likely to be financially troubled.

In addition to the overall condition of the family and the persistent mother and father roles, two of the current programs have teenagers cast in major roles (on "Good Times," and "What's Happening"). These teenagers are

talkative, humorous, and typically use black dialect to convey their points. Also, the black teens are often concerned with financial problems, possibly due to the economic condition of the family. The teens also appear supportive of the mother (both shows contain no father role) and are often shown in household maintenance functions. Young viewers exposed to black programs, as a result of these images, should more likely believe that:

H_6: Black adolescents are more concerned with family financial issues

H_7: Black youngsters exhibit different language behaviors: more talkative, and more likely to use non-standard English.

H_8: Black youths are more supportive of their mother, including participation in the maintenance of the household.

H_9: Black youths are more dependent on their mothers.

As for methods of implementing such an experiment, several approaches are possible. For one, it should be possible to introduce viewing incentives within a school situation, such that one randomly selected grouping of classes is induced to view a particular series or two over a 4-6 week period of time, and a parallel grouping is induced not to watch. Incentives can vary from monetary payments, or premium payments to class exercises in social studies. One might work with advance information from a television network, at the beginning of a new season, as to the content of forthcoming series which feature black characters. Alternately, one could seek out series no longer on the network, but available in syndication, and make arrangements for in-class or in-group showing of the experimental stimuli. In a recent project on occupational roles, we scanned the country until we found regions where the desired syndicated series were being shown by local stations, and we did the research in those naturalistic settings. The point is that several options exist, should any one of them prove too cumbersome or impractical.

In-school experiment on black social learning: Among the television roles of especial concern to black groups in this country, the role of law-breaker is a special issue. The Congressional Black Caucus (1972) has claimed that blacks are most often assigned roles that show them as violent, ignorant, lazy and subordinate. In our own content analysis of last season, fully 50% of all blacks performed physically aggressive acts.

The stereotype of the black criminal would be the focus of this experiment. The image of the black as violent, physical and criminally-related is one which most enhances fear and anxiety among U.S. whites toward blacks. It may also contribute to prejudicial attitudes. As Clark (1969) suggests, the portrayal of a minority group in regulatory roles -- as both law-breaker and law-enforcer -- is a typical content phase through which minorities pass, in dramatic fiction. Clark argues that it is the penultimate phase before mutual respect and role diversity become primary minority characterization attributes.

Young children and adults, as well, make significant inferences about black roles in society from TV content (Greenberg, 1972; Greenberg and Hanneman, 1970; Greenberg and Mazingo, 1976). For example, two-thirds of a white sample of children used television as their primary source of information about how blacks talked, looked and dressed. Thus, viewing positive or negative portrayals, law-abiding or law-breaking portrayals should set up the condition for attitudes and perceptions to form or change according to what is viewed.

For these reasons, it is important to determine if young TV watchers develop beliefs and/or expectations that blacks are more likely to be criminals, perform criminal acts, be anti-social, than they perceive them as honest, law-abiding members of society. Or at least if blacks are judged more harshly on such attributes than whites are judged.

Furthermore, among those whites who are little exposed to blacks and frequently see blacks portrayed as murderers, drug dealers and users, robbers, etc., one generally anticipates a heightening of negative evaluations of blacks. The same issue remains open for young black viewers; if they see a heavy dose of law-breaking blacks, should these portrayals not lend to changes in their self-concepts, and in their adult-role expectations?

This experiment would involve in-school viewing of a set of program tapes which manipulate (1 the portrayal of law-breakers and law-enforcers, and 2) the race of the character in those roles. The manipulation could be accomplished by editing segments from regular commercial network television programming.

Some central hypotheses are:

H_1: Exposure to law-breaking characters will lead to the perception that that race includes a heavier proportion of violent, anti-social individuals;

H_2: Exposure to law-enforcing characters will lead to the perception that the race includes a larger proportion of honest, law-abiding individuals;

H_3: Exposure to law-breaking characters of one race will induce greater anxiety about interactions with that race by other-race viewers;

H_4: Exposure to law-breaking characters of other race will lead to recommendations for harsher penalties for that race;

H_5: There is a general interaction hypotheses which suggests that there will be greater tolerance for anti-social acts, and greater appreciation for pro-social acts when those acts are committed by same-race characters than when committed by other-race characters.

For each manipulation, dependent measurements would be devised to tap cognitive and affective responses to these criminal justice roles of blacks and whites; Sample items could include:

1. Out of every 100 criminals, how many are black (white)?
2. Out of every 100 policemen, how many are black (white)?
3. How much are the black (white) people on TV like black (white) people in real life?

4. Most black (white) people in real life are dangerous and should be feared.

5. If someone was robbing a bank he/she would probably be black (white)?

6. Do black (white) people help and assist people who find themselves in trouble?

7. Trouble is ususally caused by a black (white) person.

This study addresses the question of whether television portrayals of blacks contributes to fears, anxieties and image distortions of blacks, among young people in this country. To the extent that the question is answered affirmatively, that some socially significant impact is observed, then we would expect programmers, school officials, and civil rights agencies to be among those seeking some form of redress. To the extent that no such evidence is obtained, then demonstrating the dilution of the black criminal image myth would be of equivalent social importance. The issue of whether and how much blacks are perceived or expected to be criminals is perhaps more important in terms of social responsiveness than actuarial data on the issue.

* * *

As Lee Barrow, now Dean of the Howard University School of Communication, observed in 1975, "My tentative conclusions are that we know virtually nothing about either the short or the long-term effects of television on minority children. . . If I were to place all of our knowledge in a thimble, I would probably still have room for my thumb."

Lee's thumb is neither exceptionally small or large. It would still fit, except perhaps for his thumbnail. The research we have been able to assemble may be considered equivalent to the border pieces of a 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzle. The remainder of that puzzle has yet to be collated. It is for that reason that

this paper has become more a tactical and strategic plan for solving that puzzle, than a recitation of firm, demonstrable research results. Not a single, comprehensive, longitudinal study effort has been directed at exploring television and the minority child, nor the impact of minority characters in television programs on either minority or non-minority children. We have proposed one extensive approach to those research issues; other options ought to be considered as well.

We believe that such evidence, when available, can inform media policy makers. It can inform public interest groups, and it can inform appropriate government agencies. At that time, their intersecting interests should be better able to accommodate relevant research findings. That goal should be expedited.

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